

THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 4

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4

A Song of Appreciation Mizmor Le'sodah

Background מקורות

This *Psalm* is the last of eleven *Psalms* composed by *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses) The first is *Psalm 90* which begins *Tefilla le'Moshe* (A prayer composed by Moses) and it ends with this *Psalm*. . After reciting *Hodu* (or after *Baruch She'omar* according to *Nusach Sefard*) one recites this chapter of *Psalms*.

Appreciating our Close Relationship with Hashem

This *Psalm* begins with praise of G-d in the form of *Todah*. The word *Todah* means *appreciation* or *thanksgiving*. According to Rav Hirsch, it is an acknowledgement of what G-d has meant for us in the past and what He still means to us today. Also, it is a declaration to what our relationship to Him should be in the future.

In this particular chapter of *Psalms*, *Todah* refers to a continuous state of joy of serving G-d in our daily affairs, not just when we are formally *davening* (praying) to Him or when we bring offerings in His Holy Temple - the *Beis Hamikdash*. This inner sense of joy is not altered by any outward circumstance. All mankind will

¹ Chapter 100

attain this level - as mentioned at the end of the previous *Psalm*, when G-d reveals His Divine Presence to all people in the time of the coming of the *Messiah*.

The scene was in Nazi Germany in Barrack 10 of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp during World War II. A few women who worked forced labor on German machinery, managed to smuggle enough grease away from the machinery, to use for lighting the Menorah on Chanukah. The Chanukah Menorah was fashioned by hollowing out a precious raw potato that someone had managed to get. They candle-lighting honors went Rav Israel Shapira zt"l, otherwise known as the Bluzhever Rebbe

In order not to arouse the attention of their Nazi captors, they gathered in the middle of the dark night to light them. Everyone crowded around to catch a glimpse of this holy man lighting the makeshift menorah. The Rebbe recited the blessings with fervor and joy while everyone looked on with awe and a sense of renewed hope. Everyone's spirits were lifted except for one alienated Jew who actually reproached the Rebbe for reciting the traditional blessing of She'hechyanu - in which we thank G-d for granting us the opportunity to live to fulfill this mitzvah.

He asked the Rebbe, "How can you thank G-d for keeping us alive to perform this mitzvah when our existence is no more than a living hell?"

The Rebbe paused before answering and reflected for a moment on the beautiful event that just transpired. He then said to this man "You know, I was bothered by the same question. We are truly living through untold suffering and horrors; a life walking constantly in the shadow of death. Yet, when I lit the menorah, an amazing scene unfolded. Everyone, young and old, religious and not so religious, gathered around to watch and catch a glimpse of a mitzvah from which we have been so cruelly torn. The pride of being a Jew performing G-d's commands at that moment was so palpable; one could feel it throughout one's entire being. It was particularly then that I appreciated the blessing of She'hechyanu; a profound blessing thanking G-d for granting us the opportunity to live and fulfill His commands."

4 Aspects of our Relationship with G-d

The *Malbim*² explains that 4 aspects of our relationship with G-d are mentioned in this *Psalm*.

² Chapter 99

- 1) He made us (*Hu assanu*) הוא עשנו
- 2) We are His (*ve'lo anachnu*) ולו אנחנו
- 3) We are His nation and He is our King (*amo*) עמו
- 4) He sustains us and leads us directing our lives i.e. Divine Providence (*ve'tzone marisso – the sheep he pastures*). וצאן מראיתו.

In examining our unique & close relationship with G-d, it is important to appreciate every aspect of it, so that we recognize and realize how extensive it can be. This is especially important at a time when we owe a debt of gratitude to G-d for something in particular He has done for us.

Korban Todah – An Offering of Appreciation

The *Korban Todah* was an offering brought in the Holy Temple as thanks to *Hashem* for rescue from 4 difficult situations⁴. It may also be brought by anyone at any time that wishes to express gratitude to *Hashem*. Since this animal offering was accompanied by 40 loaves of bread, it could only be brought when it would be feasible to eat the bread within the prescribed time. 30 were unleavened – *Matzah* and 10 were leavened bread. Since all these many loaves had to be eaten by midnight of the day of the offering, they were generally shared with friends and neighbors. This was the perfect setting in which gratitude to *Hashem* could be demonstrated by telling the story of one's rescue to those present and sharing the meal. For this reason we do not recite *Mizmor Le'sodah* every single day of the year. The *Korban* was not brought on certain days when the time allotted to eat it was limited e.g. on *Yom Kippur* eve or the eve of *Passover*. On *Yom Kippur* eve one is forbidden to eat since the fast begins at nightfall. Likewise, on the eve of *Passover* one must refrain from eating both bread and even *Matzah* during the day, well

³ Malbim R' Meir Leib Ben Yechiel Michael – Born: Voloshisk, Poland, c. 1809. **Died:** Kiev, Russia, 1879. **Notes:** Commentator and gifted public speaker. He was appointed Rav of Wrteschen in 1839 and Rav of Bucharest and Chief Rabbi of Romania after 1858. A leading opponent of reform, he was imprisoned due to false accusations by the reformers. He was sentenced to death and only through the efforts of Sir Moses Montefiori did the Romanian government change his sentence to exile. Author of **Malbim on Chumash**, where he focuses on the connection between the Oral Law and the Written Law, as well as a commentary on the whole *Tanach*. Both gained widespread acceptance. Author of **Artzot HaChaim**, a commentary on the Shulchan Aruch.

⁴ See Gemora Berachos 54b for the list of people required to bring such an offering. They are those who traveled overseas or through the desert. Also, one who was sick and recovered or was taken captive and released.

before nightfall. Hence, on these days we would omit *Mizmor Le'sodah* as the *Korban Todah* would not be offered in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Nowadays, we recite this chapter daily, and not after living through one of the four events mentioned above. In the latter situations, one recites *Birchas Hagomeil*.

Laws דינים

- § *Mizmor Le'sodah* is recited every weekday but not on Shabbos or Yom Tov. It is, however, recited on minor holidays such as *Chanukah*. It is also recited during the intermediate days of *Succos* but not during the intermediate days of Passover since it contains 10 leavened breads (*chametz*) that are prohibited during Passover.
- § Some *Sephardim* recite *Mizmor Le'sodah* even on the above-mentioned holidays as well (but not during the intermediate days of Passover)⁷.
- § One should recite *Mizmor Le'sodah* with much joy and gratitude and with a tune.
- § The custom is to recite it while standing.
- § According to other customs it is said while sitting down.
- § It is recited on the eve of the fast day of *Tish'a B'Av* and even on the fast of *Tish'a B'Av* itself.

May G-d's Glory endure... Yehi Chevode Hashem Le'olam

Background מקורות

This passage is a collection of verses from two of the three sections of *Tanach* (The Five books of Moses, and the books of Scriptures).

⁵ Please note the *Halacha* section of this lesson contains a full list of days we omit *Mizmor Le'sodah* and the various different customs regarding this.

⁶ The Blessing of *Hagomeil* (Thanksgiving Blessing) is customarily recited after being called up to the Torah (*Aliyah*), although the latter is not obligatory and it can be said independently. For further details see Orach Chaim Simon 219. The blessings are as follows: הגומל העולם. הַגּוֹמֵל יְנוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם. בְּרַךְ אֱתָהּ הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם. הַגּוֹמֵל יְנוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם. הַגּוֹמֵל יְנוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם. The congregants respond וְהָיָה לְכָל טוֹב מִי שֶׁגָּמְלָךְ כָּל טוֹב. הוּא יְגַמְלֶךְ כָּל טוֹב. לְחַיִּים טוֹבוֹת. שְׂגַמְלֵנִי כָּל טוֹב טוֹב סְלָה.

⁷ *Yalkut Yosef*, "Kitzur" volume 1, 45-54:37

Interestingly, it consists of 18 verses corresponding to the 18 blessings of the *Amidah She'mone Esrei*. G-d's Name is mentioned 19 times corresponding to the original 18 blessings of the *Amidah She'mone Esrei* and the subsequent additional blessing added later in the time of Rabban Gamliel⁹.

In Preparation for the Praises of Hallelukah

The subject, here, is G-d's glory and sovereignty. G-d's exaltation over the world and mankind is emphasized as well. Thus, before beginning the chapters of *Hallelukahs* (Chapters of Praise) we first remind ourselves of G-d's greatness which is beyond all human comprehension. Once we recognize G-d's eminence, we can proceed to praise G-d in our own feeble manner, knowing that we have really no way of truly comprehending the profundity of His actions. Only if we realize that whatever the human mind can appreciate and comprehend is so far from His true state of exaltedness can we then proceed to praise G-d with the *Pesukei De'zimra*.

G-d reigns, G-d has reigned, G-d shall
reign for all eternity

Hashem melech Hashem malach Hashem
yimloch le'olam va'ed

Background מקורות

This is not a single verse in *Tanach*, but it is a combination of three distinct verses. It aptly expresses the theme we mentioned earlier in the *Mizmor Le'sodah*, that we must appreciate each aspect of our unique relationship with G-d, past, present, and future.

As stated earlier, this *Psalm* also alludes to the time of the Messiah when all mankind will recognize G-d. 3 verses from *Hallel* follow emphasizing the permanence of mankind's recognition of the Creator. This brings us to the verse of *Yismechu hashamayim ve'sageil ha'aretz*, which then leads into the declaration of *Hashem melech le'olam va'ed, avdu goyim me'artzo ...*

⁸ *Tanach* is an acronym for Torah (Five books of Moses) Nevi'im (The books of the Prophets) and Kesuvim (The books of Scriptures)

⁹ Berachos 28b

G-d reigns forever and ever when the
Nations will have perished from His
earth

Hashem melech le'olam va'ed, Avdu goyim
me'artzo

As the previous verses were alluded to the time of the Messiah, we now learn that "Nations" will cease to exist as political entities. They will become "families" since all mankind will be united under the banner of G-d. *Hashem* blesses Abraham in a similar fashion – all the "families" of the earth will bless themselves through Avraham (*Ve'nivrechu be'cha kol mishpechos ho'adma*).

The Pesukei De'zimra – Verses in Song

Ashrei and the last 5 Chapters of Psalms

Background מקורות

Ashrei begins the most important and integral part of *Pesukei De'zimra*. To fulfill the minimum requirement for *Pesukei De'zimra*, one must at least recite *Ashrei* in order to validate the opening and closing blessing for *Pesukei De'zimra*, *Baruch She'omar* and *Yishtabach*.

Ashrei comprises the chapter of *Psalms*¹⁰ beginning with the words *Tehilla Le'David* (A praise composed by David). It consists of verses that begin with the Alef Bet (The Hebrew alphabet¹¹). The two opening verses, which begin with the word *Ashrei* (fortunate) from other *Psalms*. They preface chapter 145 which itself begins with the opening words *Tehilla le'David*. The reason we *do* this is to acknowledge our good fortune in being chosen for this task of praising G-d.

¹⁰ Chapter 145

¹¹ The original source for the word *alphabet* – *Alef bet*.

The following chapters are the next 5 chapters of *Psalms*. They all begin with the word *Hallelukah* (*Praise G-d*) and end with the word *Hallelukah* with the final *Hallelukah* concluding the book of *Psalms*. The last verse *Va'anachnu nevareich Kah ... Hallelukah* said at the end of *Ashrei* is actually a verse from a different *Psalm*¹².

The Gemora in Shabbos 118b states:

Says Rebbe Yossi – Let my portion be with those who recite the entire Hallel daily. This means the set of Hallelukahs of Pesukei De'zimra.

The Abudraham explains that reciting the final 6 chapters of *Psalms* is like sending an emissary to precede one's Prayer (*Tefilla*)¹³ so that it will be accepted by G-d with favor.

The Gemora in *Berachos* 4b states:

Whoever recites Tehilla le'Dovid daily is assured a portion in The World to Come (Olam Haba). The significance of this chapter is that it contains all the letters of the Alef bet as well as the special verse (Pose'ach es yadecha – open your hands ...) attributing the sustenance of all Creation, to G-d. The Tur in Simon 51 says that the most significant part of this chapter is the verse attributing the sustenance of all Creation to G-d.

The Abudraham maintains that the reason we add the final verse *Va'anachnu nevareich kah - we will praise G-d* is to show that one who recites this chapter with proper concentration is assured a portion in The World to Come, as the last verse ends "From now until 'eternity'" (lit. "The World", i.e. the World to Come). On the other hand Rav Amram writes that we recite it for the sake of saying the *Hallelukah* together with the rest of the verses that begin and end with that word.

Laws דִּינֵי

- § One who recites the verse *Pose'ach es yadecha – open your hands ...* without concentration must repeat it.
- § If one reminds himself of this further into *Pesukei De'zimra*, one should go back and repeat this verse and continue from there until

¹² 115:18

¹³ This refers to the subsequent *Amidah/ She'moneh Esrei* Prayer.

the end of *Ashrei* before resuming where one reached in *Pesukei De'zimra*, before going back .

- § In order for one to recite the blessings of *Baruch She'omar* and *Yishtabach*, one must at least say the verse of *Ashrei* in between.
- § If one has a little more time, one should also recite verses 148 and 150 that have multiple mention of the word *Hallelukah*
- § If one has even more time, the rest of the *Hallelukahs* should be recited before anything else.

מנהג Custom

It is customary to touch the arm *Tefillin* when reciting the words *Pose'ach es yadecha* and to then kiss those fingers. After the second half of the verse, one should do the same for the head *Tefillin* .

רמז Hint

- § The verse *Pose'ach es yadecha* in Hebrew ends with the letters *Chet, Taf and Chaf*. According to *Kabalistic* writings, these letters represent the Angel in charge of income – *Chatach* פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת יָדַיְךָ (חֲתָךְ).

Thus when saying *Open your hands - Pose'ach es yadecha*, asking G-d to open His hands and provide us with a means of livelihood, we should understand that it is only G-d who really provides not our cleverness or the "*might of our hands*".

However, there is an Angel in charge of executing G-d's will. Our Sages have taught that livelihood is given directly by G-d Himself and not through any emissaries. Thus, we ask G-d directly to send abundance through the angel (*malach*) who is the conduit for this purpose.

Skipping in Pesukei De'zimra

The Gemora in *Berachos*¹⁴ brings a verse (*pasuk*) *Behold G-d, doesn't despise the large assemblage*¹⁵ (*Hein Keil Kabir ve'lo yim'oss, Job/ Iyov 36: 5*). Another verse states *G-d*

¹⁴ *Daf 8a*

¹⁵ Literal translation- *Behold G-d is mighty and doesn't despise*

*redeems my soul peacefully; because of the multitude. He's with me*¹⁶ (*Pad'ah bashalom nafshi kee be'rabbim hay'ah imadee*). Therefore, one must skip part of *Pesukei De'zimra* if necessary, in order to reach the *Amidah - She'mone Esrei* together with everyone else (*tefilla be'tzibbur*) because the whole purpose of reciting *Pesukei De'zimra* is that the *Amidah She'mone Esrei* should be readily accepted by G-d., One who prays *She'mone Esrei* with the rest of the congregation (*tefilla be'tzibbur*) is assured that his prayer will be accepted. It accomplishes the goal of reciting *Pesukei De'zimra* more effectively¹⁷. In order to catch up with the congregation, one has to skip some parts of *Pesukei De'zimra* as outlined below:

- § A person must come early enough to *shul* so that he can put on his *Tallis* – (Prayer shawl) and *Tefillin* and say the *Birchos Hashachar* in advance so that he is ready to *daven* the *Pesukei De'zimra* along with the congregation (*tzibbur*).
- § If he is late, then his priority is to reach the *Amidah (She'mone Esrei)* so he can *daven* together with the congregation.

The *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*¹⁸ writes "*Tefillas tzibbur* (*davening with a Minyan*¹⁹) is always pleasant and accepted by *Hashem*.

- § One should not skip the *Pesukei De'zimra* entirely, even if it means missing praying the *She'mone Esrei* with the congregation.
- § One who skipped *Pesukei De'zimra* should say the *Pesukei De'zimra* after *davening* but without the blessing of *Baruch She'omar* and *Yishtabach*.

¹⁶ Literal translation- *He redeemed my soul in peace from battles against me, for with many were against me*

¹⁷ According to this explanation an individual davening without a *minyan* shouldn't skip the *Pesukei De'zimra* since he needs to do as much as he can so that his *tefila* is accepted. We need to examine what would be the *Halacha* if someone was davening at home but needs to skip *Pesukei De'zimra* so that he can at least daven at the time the *tzibbur* will be davening in *shul*. Is davening at the same time as the *tzibbur* davens as good as *tefila be'tzibbur*? Apparently not. Therefore most likely he shouldn't change the order of his *tefila* and say the *Pesukei De'zimra* without skipping even if davening at the time the *tzibbur* davens is equally significant. This makes no sense at all- I'm too tired to sort it out! This point will be discussed in the next shiur *b'ezras Hashem*.

¹⁸ 52: 1 – *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* – HaGaon Rabbeinu Shneur Zalman of Liadi/the Graz. **Born:** Liazna, Russia, 1745. **Died:** Kursk, Russia, 1813. **Notes:** Founder of Chabad, also known as the Alter Rebbe of Lubavitch and as the Ba'al HaTanya. Among other works author of **Shulchan Aruch HaRav**, a major code of law following the framework of the *Shulchan Aruch* and incorporating later authorities; of **Tanya**, a major treatise on Kabala and Chassidic philosophy, and of **Torah Or**, a collection of Chassidic discourses on the weekly Parshas and Festivals, published by his grandson, the *Tzemach Tzedek*.

¹⁹ Ten males over the age of *Bar Mitzvah*

§ One should avoid the habit of coming late to *davening* and skipping the *Pesukei De'zimra* or just abbreviating them, because one loses its benefits and causes more spiritual harm than good.

Questions:

1. What is the main principle behind *Mizmor Le'sodah*? (Rav Hirsch)
2. What 4 reasons are listed in *Mizmor Le'sodah* that demonstrates our closeness with *Hashem*?
3. *He made us (Hu assanu) הוּא עָשָׂנוּ* – How does this show our unique relationship with *Hashem*? Didn't *Hashem* make everything, including all the nations of the world?
4. How many loaves of bread were there in a *Korban Todah* and how does this contribute to fulfilling the purpose of the *Korban*?
5. Why were certain days not appropriate for bringing the *Korban Todah*? Give some examples.
6. What takes the place of a *Korban Todah* nowadays?
7. In which ways does *Yehi Chevode* resemble *She'mone Esrei*?
8. What is unique about the stanza of *Hashem melech Hashem malach Hashem yimloch le'olam va'ed*?
9. How do we understand the *pasuk Avdu goyim me'artzo (the Nations will have perished from His earth)* since we also know that everyone, even non-Jews will recognize *Hashem* as the One and only when He reveals His glory to the world?
10. Why may it be necessary to skip part of *Pesukei De'zimra* to reach *She'mone Esrei*?

Answers:

1. The idea is to praise and thank *Hashem*, for all that He provides for us constantly. We are to show a continuous state of joy in serving G-d in our daily affairs, not just when we are formally *davening* to Him or when we are bringing offerings in His Holy Temple- the *Beis Hamikdash*.
2. 1) He made us (*Hu assanu*) הוא עשנו
2) We are His (*ve'lo anachnu*) ולו אנחנו
3) We are His nation and He is our King (*amo*) עמו
4) He sustains us and directs our lives i.e. Divine Providence (*ve'tzone marisso – the sheep he pastures*) וצאן מראיתו.
3. It refers to *Hashem* – and how He formed us into a nation. Our nationhood depends on our adherence to Torah and *Mitzvos*. The Land of Israel is secondary, being a place where it is ideal to perform the Torah's commands. Other nations depend solely on their land as the basis of their nationality.
4. There were 40 loaves of bread, which had to be eaten by midnight. This meant that friends and neighbors would be invited to share in the *Korban*. This provided an audience for the one who brought the *Korban* so that he could express his gratitude to *Hashem* publicly.
5. On certain days one was not allowed to eat the *Korban* either because of its Chametz content (*Erev Pesach*) or because it was a day one was not allowed to eat at all (*Yom Kippur*).
6. We recite the *Birchas Hagomeil*.
7. It contains 18 verses and the Name of *Hashem*.
8. It is a combination of three separate verses.
9. The “Nations” will cease to exist as political entities. Rather they will exist as “families” since at this point all mankind will be united as one under the banner of G-d.
10. Since it is important to *daven She'mone Esrei* with the *tzibbur* (congregation) – this ensures the acceptance of the *Tefilla*.